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Thorold

MARY HOWE TOTTEN

THOROLD
AND OTHER POEMS

THOROLD
AND OTHER POEMS

By
MARY HOWE TOTTEN

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Prologue

A goddess stood at my poor door and smiled—
A goddess all in woven rainbows clad;
And in her hand a sheaf of iris-buds,
And by her side a tablet and a style,
And on her lips the bloom, and in her eyes
The light of radiant, never-fading youth.

I knew her, and I cried: "O glorious Muse!
Thou that from immemorial years hast told
To human kind so many famous tales,—
In fashion varying with the changing time,—
Hast thou, perhaps, another story left,
And wilt thou tell it me?"

Slow smiling still
The lovely apparition answered: "Write!"
Report the epic Muse! Upon what hearth
Of common use will burn celestial fire?
Or, how, with feeble mortal pen, transcribe
Words that in golden hours Immortals speak?

The spiritual ear alone discerns
Those harmonies that in our vulgar tongue
Must then, how hardly, be interpreted—
It will not be; yet must the scribe obey,
Hearing that clear, imperious mandate: "Write!"

Tharold

I.

Mid-afternoon in Arlen, warm and still
The Palace lay. The sleepy sentinels
Before the open gates stood stark upright,
Save when a sudden, most suggestive lurch—
Straightway atoned for by a stiffer pose
And glare of bristling indignation—showed
The seeming statues human. Little stir
Disquieted the halls within; all wooed,
That might, the light siesta at this hour;
And passing through the courts and corridors
One might have thought to find the still retreat
Wherein some lovely sleeper, dreaming, smiled
In happy prescience of a kiss. Not so;
The heart of all this drowsy peace was not
A sleeping maiden, but a restless man.

Far from the entrance gates, and at the end
Of many a luxurious suite that lined
Successive quadrangles, a broad stair led
To where the Prince in his apartments paced
Alone.

Where the great windows faced the sea
A splendid cloistered balcony was hung,
Both long and broad, and draped with silken stuffs,
The fruit of Flemish looms. Gay cushions, piled
On soft-hued rugs, invited languor;
Flowers bloomed in jars of precious pottery;
And where in front three pointed arches rose,
Upspringing from light pillars garlanded
With sculptured wreaths of mimic vine and bloom,
They framed great lucent spaces, where, without,
In one continuous glowing heaven blent,
Blue ocean and blue sky sparkled and shone.

A scene of beauty and of peace wherein
Prince Thorold in corporeal presence moved;
And yet 'twas through a desert that he fled,
Pursued by stinging and intolerable thoughts.
So by the scourged mind was the body driven
As up and down the balcony he paced
In moody silence, broken now and then
By sharp ejaculations. For he thought:
"What is it worth?—this dull and creeping life!
So creep all lives, all low and lustreless;
Where some are sluggish, some ambitious,
Some idle, some unceasingly at work,
And all in vain! Just a mere human hive
Wherein men work that they may eat—then eat
That they may work, in endless, restless round.
Gain! Only gain; to filch from every day,
From each event, from every neighbor-clod

Some mean advantage, some ignoble joy!
So runs the turbid current of the race,
The common herd, the undistinguished mass.
Ah! If it ended there! If only here,
Here, where we ape the high prerogative
Of Heaven's justice, something worthier
O'er-shot the lower level; if but they
Who sit in judgment needed judgment less.
If those who govern only cared to lift
The burthens, heal the wounds, redress the wrongs,
Raise up the masses. If the great, themselves,
By notable example, sought to show
The crowd the better way! But they are all,
All, all alike! We never break the laws
We frame. Oh no! We only set at naught
The laws of God. Here—here, where smiling sit
Our smug respectabilities, tricked out
In purple and bedizened with the stale
Pretense of spotless ermine; all about
Their portly, comfortable shoulders hung
The pretty braveries of chains and seals;
Their dignity a matter of long robes
And golden sticks of office, nothing more;
What hope is here? Alas! Who speaks of hope?

"If, as the great old fables figured forth,
Above us, ranging row on row, unseen,
At their perpetual feasts barbaric gods
Indeed reclined, their leisure entertained
By Earth's long serio-comic drama, thence

How might they gaze and hold their mighty sides
And roar until they rent the echoing dome
With laughter at the daily-acted jest
Of our most august council-table, where,
Forsooth, *I* sit! Pity to waste unmarked
So much good fooling—where the art is taught,
And learned so well, how *not* to serve the State.

"How often I, with my green optimism,
Imagining that all the high-flown saws
I heard repeated by our sages there
About high duty, patriotism, right
For right's own sake, meant something, lifted up
My voice in favor of some just reform
For which the body-politic cried out—
Have been heard out respectfully indeed
By men of twice my age and more, grown old
In carrying water on both shoulders so
Precisely not a single drop was spilled.
How gravely would some pursy statesman then
Take up the parable: 'There was much force
In what his Highness said. Abuses, yes,
Abuses did exist—increased, perhaps,
Beyond the truth by common rumor; still
Somewhat there was we might be glad to change
If feasible. But in this world, alas!
Where find perfection? For this matter, here
Great interests were involved, behooved us go
Most carefully,'—and so forth. So he talked
And vapored on, reducing to a pulp

Of coward policy what justice asked
Or reason urged. And, having done no stroke
To ease the nations' burdens, with what airs
Of precedence, what grave formalities
Of rank, they rose and went to dinner! So,
Beneath unjust exactions, hampered too
By laws that cramp their natural genius close
And keep them low, the plodding people groan.

"And when we went to war, how was it then?
As I, of this brave spectacle of peace
Was part, so too of that. I went to war
And tasted glory! 'Twas no different,
Save that we killed the wretches faster so
For childish quarrels. There I gained some scars
And more disgust. And when the courtiers praised
My valor, how it sickened me!
"Then there's
The church, home of convention, stronghold hoar
Of every old abuse that shows the brand
Of aristocracy. With priests that serve
The strongest for the tithes, and are so loud
With their "Lord! Lord!" they cannot hear the cry
Of suffering men. The King is old, hedged round
By counsellors who keep him from the truth—
I can do nothing."

Here a rustle caught
The Prince's ear, and looking up he saw
The tall, lean form and whimsical, lined face

Of Itel, the old King's old jester, perched
Within the window, looking out; with brows
Drawn high in pointed arches, lips pursed close,
And cheeks creased in long hollows, 'twixt the sly
Pretense of deep solemnity and mirth.
"How now, Sir Fool, methought I gave command
That nobody should be admitted!"
"Aye,
Your Highness, therefore did he come. I knew
It was myself Your Highness had in mind
In that most gracious order. So to be
The only one assisting at the most
Important lucubrations of the great
Is surely worthy of the greatest Fool.
But what can Nobody do for you, now
He's here?" Thus with a sideways-tilted head,
Like to a lean and solemn bird, the Fool.

As who should say "what matters anything?"
Resignedly the sad Prince cast him down
Upon a heap of cushions, and with head
Bent forward, eyes half-closed, and lips half-drawn
Into a smile, regarded silently
His kindly old companion; thinking too
How many a day, though well in middle age,
Had Itel been his childhood's playmate, borne
Him upon his back, and made the Palace
Parks and gardens ring with madcap laughter
As he ran. Itel, that taught him wood-lore
And how to net the fish, and where were hid

The shyest birds' nests. "Let him chatter then;
And either way, what difference to me
To weary of the Fool or of myself."
Therefore, all signs propitious, Itel sprang
Upon the sill (disdaining the broad door),
Whence, sitting there cross-leggéd, he prepared
To hold forth at his ease; and with a most
Portentous, droll grimace, that masked some real
Anxiety, began:

"Methinks a leech
Is needed here, Your Highness; here I am.
'Twas only t'other day I heard a man
Declare 'twas only fools knew everything';
And though all laughed, I'm sure the doctrine's true.
Have you forgot the efficacious dose
I used to give you, not so long ago,
For—pardon the word, but you remember
We called it so—the sillies? Pardon still
If I suggest I have some yet. For though
A Prince grow, humble herbs will grow as well.
And where we used to cull the simples, close
Beside the sunny wall,—Your Highness knows?
In the old garden,—there the crocus still
Grows rank, the patch as much increased in size
As are Your Highness's inches—and perhaps
The years have given it added potency
To suit a fierce attack like this!
'Twas formerly a mere affair at most
Of privilege curtailed, or some reproof

Received from your old tutor. Now, perchance
(If not an indigestion), it may be
The pocket's ailing,—or—or is not *she*
Propitious? Nay, I thought you'd smile, and you
Are frowning! Needs another balm for that;
For here I have—just see, Your Highness, here's
The dear old soothing-stone I used to rub
Your little cheek withal when you were wroth.
The stone that the sea-fairies made so smooth!
It grates upon my beard, although so smooth;
But on your cheek I'm sure 'twould meet with less
Obstruction. There! You smile!—the charm has worked
At mere beholding of it. This at least
Has surely doubled its old power. But hear,
Just listen to the last new song I made."

Therewith, with all fantastic airs of an
Approved musician, crisply fingering
His bauble as it were a mandolin,
Blithely the jester raised his voice and sang:

"Simples for the simple,
Soothing for the wroth;
Quick! put out the candle
Before it burns the moth!

"Moths will seek the fire
And find it all too soon;
Men will waste the daylight
Pining for the moon.

"Moths and men thus witless
Ought to go to school
And learn a little wisdom
By listening to a Fool."

"Ah, Itel," cried the Prince, "dear Itel, sure
Though wisdom fly the council and the court,
A little does it linger with the Fool
That hath the rare sagacity of love!
It shows through all thy fooling: Sympathy
And love—as once for the unmothered child,
Now for the man that, grown to man's estate,
Seems more unguided, not less ignorant
Than the child."

And springing on a sudden
To his feet, once more the Prince began,
As one distraught, his hurried walk. "Ah why,
Why not," he mused, "live like the rest; trim down
These ardent aspirations to the form
That's most affected by the crowd? Is not
An ignominious peace far better worth
Than ignominious strife? In vain, in vain!
There's something here that will not be controlled;
Within my breast a voice I cannot still,
A strange dark Oracle that will not tell
The whole—that never shows the way, but speaks
In hints that will not let me rest—that says
'These ways are not for thee, there's something more.'
But what? But where? For common walks of men,

Though warm and sweet, I am unfit, and know
No other. And the King says: 'Marry, son,
Select among the ladies of the court
A charming consort. 'Tis thy duty to.'
Then which of these well-nurtured, high-born bits
Of fair conventionality shall be
The choice? Each has a different name, and some
Slight spice of nature left, distinguishing
Her from the rest. The lady Adela?
A mere coquette. The lady Irmengarde?
A hoyden. Lady Isabel? Still worse,
A devotee—that worships with no more
Of reason than the others play. Well, then,
The ladies Olga, Hilda, Thelma? All
Of a like pattern. Then—Emilia?
Not in the catalogue! Of other shes
We say they're well, or ill, or foolish, or—
Who knows? One might be found that's wise! There's
none
Can put an estimate upon this girl,
So beautiful, so enigmatic—No!
I will not marry—that way lies no help.
Study is vain, action is vain: Nothing
I help or hinder."

So, forgetful all
That Itel watched him, nursed the Prince
His strange despair, while with foreboding eyes
The fond Fool followed him. At last he rose,
And sighing said: "The hour grows late, the King

Expects me; but before I go pray you
To let me say one word, Your Highness."
"Ay,
Say on."
"'Tis but to beg you curb these moods
That menace danger to your mind and life.
Did'st ever, Highness, hear of him they called
The Red Prince, long since of your ancient line?"

"Nay, who was he?"

"A haughty youth and wild;
Full of strange humors none could understand.
'Twas long ago—but so they tell the tale.
Nothing could satisfy him, naught restrain.
Sometimes he shut himself away alone
And would not speak to mortal, nor be seen;
Anon mad deeds of daring led him forth
And nothing was too wild to be essayed,
Until at last he vanished—whisper!—in
The Wikkenwold,—and never was seen more."
So speaking, with suspended breath, and eyes
Dilated to an eager gaze of wild
Intensity, stood Itel for a space;
Then backward from the presence, bowing low,
He stepped and so was gone.

And rigid there,
Transfixed as by enchantment, stood the Prince,
Musing with sombre gaze upon the spot
Left vacant by the jester. Softly then,

Slowly, as 'twere a word to conjure with,
Repeated, "in the Wikkenwold"! Why not?
Why, when the common world of every day
Grows alien to us, may we not find scope
By penetrating the unknown? The plants
Find each congenial soil; then, must the soul
Be homeless? And the ancient tales—how oft
I've heard them, now grown vague and lost—
Of reckless knights that sought th' enchanted wood,
Of prodigies that met them there. How then?
Did any thence return? Forgotten all.
But then, if not, who told the prodigies?
I know not, care not—I will go. What fear?
If I find death 'twill not be worse than life.
No mother left to grieve for me; the King
Has other sons and will not lack an heir;
'Tis settled—and I go."

II.

Before the dawn,
While all were sleeping, from the palace gate
Forth rode the Prince, full clad in armor, plain
Of all device. High on the knightly helm
No silver wyvern writhed; and on the shield
No blazonry, argent and azure, told
The curious that the heir-apparent fared
Upon an unknown errand, and alone.
The sentinels, as by the wavering flare
Of the pale torches they discerned the Prince,
Saluted gravely, with a sidelong glance,
That seemed to say, however such as they
Might have their thoughts of such as he, needs must
Such thoughts observe a strict incognito.
So forth he rode. His lusty charger, glad
After long days of idleness to be
Once more in action, sniffed the freshening air
And curvetted in joy of conscious strength,
As, turning to the left, the Prince drew rein
To look a moment from the Palace hill.
From a clear field the great full-spheréd moon
Still shed its splendor on a quiet sea
Where lay its long, bright track untroubled, save
For gentlest waves that only broke its light

To scatter it in sparkles brighter still
From every toppling crest. Dark on the glow
Of lucent sky the Palace loomed, clear-cut,
With all its towers and battlemented walls,
Flanked either side by shadowy foliage.
Thence the long hill descended, bowered all
In park and gardens, glimmering between
The silvery radiance and bosky gloom.
Below him lay the city still in sleep;
And wondering, "Shall I see it all again?"
The Prince went down and set himself to thread
The narrow serpentine of its dark streets;
So winding in and out until he came
To the closed gate that opened at his word.
And through the suburb, with the sunrise, where
The new day's life began to stir—and out
Among the fields, to where sweet nature seems
Hardly to linger, but on every side
Close pressing toward her children of the towns
With fond maternal yearning, tendering,
Instead of wearing turmoil, all the peace
And quiet of her breast.

Something of this
The restless pilgrim felt; his mood was calm,
Though sad. So beautiful before him lay
The world in dewy, morning freshness bathed,
And seemed to proffer him delicious draughts
Of fragrant balm, that, in deep breaths, he drank.
So sweet the prospect and the hour, almost

He deemed that what he saw was not mere show
Nor crude utility; the light not meant
Only to show the path; the herbage not
Mere pasture; nor the blue, far mountains just
Earth's surface crumpled. So for a moment
Vaguely it seemed as though beneath it all,
Glowing through all, were sympathy and love,
And these for him, and his sore heart was soothed.

Then as he rode, and human life began
To stir along the way, the peasants, bowed
By daily labor, going to their tasks,
Dull tasks and sordid cares their only thought;
Hunger their taskmaster; their ambition,
Bread; their goal the grave—"Alas!" he thought, "that
Only? What better are they worth—these men
That eat and sleep, perpetuate their kind
And die? And endless generations gone
Have lived this life! What love is here? What care?
What sympathy for toiling human kind?
All dark! And they, so ignorant, they too
Must suffer while they toil—and there's no end!
I remember, when a boy, in long, bright
Idle afternoons, where beetling cliffs
Hedge in the sea at Arlen, as I climbed
Among the rocks, I used to find still pools
Left by receding tides in hollowed bowls,
Like little limpid lakes, in the gray stone.
So bright they were, and clear and crystalline;
And in their depths and fastened to the rock

They were alive with barnacles, that kept
One constant motion with their tiny claws,
Like filmy spirals, gathering in their food
Invisible in the transparent brine.
With what delight I watched them, till the long,
Unceasing movement grew a monstrous thing,
Oppressive in its slow monotony.
Child as I was, I felt a crushing sense
Of swarming life—myriads on myriads, there
And everywhere; of ceaseless action too,
Repeated changelessly, until well-nigh
I could have shrieked only to think of it.
And in the human race what difference?
From endless time that's past to endless time
To come, they swarm and pass and swarm again,
All without meaning—without use or goal."
Thus as he rode his thoughts ran sadly on,
With much of bitterness to vex their course,
Yet never hindered they his helping hand.
The grieving child, the over-driven beast,
The toil-aged crone that bent beneath a load
Of crushing faggots—all had soothing word,
Cause championed, or burden made more light.

With casual pauses by the way to buy
Refreshment at poor cottages, to rest
By night at humble inns where little choice
Appeared 'twixt comforts spread for man
Or beast, two days were passed, and on the third
Bright morn his way lay high upon the banks

Of a majestic river. Still above
The hills on either side arose, all set
With giant crags, like nature's fortresses,
Outcropping from the green of grassy slopes;
While here and there, at hostile distances,
A lofty isolated rock was capped
With a rude tower, some feudal chieftain's hold,
So roughly hewn it seemed by nature formed
Part of the rugged cliff on which it perched—
Like to a nest, whose little artisan
Has covered it with wood-moss cunningly
Till where its dainty cup upon the twig
Clings fast, its softly blended grays and greens
From out the very substance of the tree
Seem lightly burgeoning. The further heights
Were crowned with forests, and below, the broad,
Bright river swept in long meandering curves
Between the hills, its silvery, breast be-gemmed
With little emerald islands. Over all,
The laughing sky, and peace of early day
And summer in its prime.

Prince Thorald's way
Was by a road worn smooth by many feet—
Of feudal lords, that with their numerous trains,
Swept forth on foray bent; of caravans
Laden with bales of costly merchandise;
Of stern crusaders bound for Palestine;
Of monks and beggars, robbers, minstrels gay,
Or pious long-cloaked pilgrims setting forth

With staff and scrip, or slowly plodding home
With holy palms and wreath'ed scallop-shells
From far Jerusalem.

But at a point
The crowding foot-prints left the ancient way
And for a distance beat a newer path
Beneath the sheltering wood, and following these,
And from the leafy covert looking forth,
The Prince divined the cause. For on the height
That topped the farther shore, where domineered
Those fiercely beetling crags, he knew the towers,
The hated stronghold of the Goshawk's Nest.
There, scourge of all the country-side, he ruled,
Black Baron Rupert, with his ten swart sons;
For none that promised booty might pass near
Save at his peril from this ruffian crew
That in their evil fame found all their pride,
Their sweetest homage in the fears of men.

As Thorold watched, the castle was alive
With armored troopers that came crowding forth,
Took horse, and in a long procession filed
Adown the narrow, tortuous descent.
And, though the river rolled its breadth between,
There did he mark, still black at sixty-odd,
Old Baron Rupert, hawk-eyed and hawk-beaked,
And all the brood of sons, dark-skinned, dark-haired,

With glittering, restless, close-set eyes, and beaked
Like birds of prey; while black against the shine
Of every burnished helm their dreaded crest
The hawk, intent to strike, rode high. With these
A swaggering train of followers, a-flaunt
With scarves and plumes and splendid housings, spoil
Of many a murderous foray; with bruit
Of clanging weapons, jingling harness, jest
And roar of reckless laughter—proof enough
Some evil deed was forward.

At the sight
The watcher turned, and with a swelling heart
Went on his way. Remembering him how,
Some two years since, there came to Arlen's court
Sad suppliants, imploring that the King,
Their suzerain lord, might help them 'gainst this man,
The measure of whose crimes, so long heaped up,
O'erbrimmed at last; and how, to match those crimes,
Black Rupert's gold was piled, a liberal mass
To block the way of justice. Past that gold
No courtier's eye could see, and so they smoothed
The matter to the King and sent away
The suitors with vague hopes and flatteries
And generous alms of lies; while, as before,
The bandit prospered. Brooding on these things,
Still more did Thorold's soul cry out against
The world. "Away! Away!" it urged him, "far,
Far from all sight and sound of men. Wild beasts,
Fierce war of elemental nature, cold,

And heat, and solitude—I welcome all
That frees me from the blight, the leper touch
Of craven human-kind. God's image? Aye,
And cast of roadside muck; I'll have no more!
Away! into the wilderness."

From thence,
With ever fiercer zeal, urged he the quest
Of the enchanted forest, following the clues
Of old tradition passed from lip to lip
Among the peasant folk, that crossed themselves
And stared each other in the face like men
Distraught to hear the great, brave, stranger-Knight
Questioning of that place. Soon toward the East
The rumors led him, till he came at last
Into a barren land whose only growth
Was thorns that hardly found a foothold there
Upon a stony soil, thick set with rocks
That towered high in strange, fantastic shapes,
Like castellated walls, like dragons reared
To spring, like images of men erect
Upon gigantic pedestals; of men
And unknown forms of beasts in every pose,
As of a wild, weird tumult, suddenly
Turned to unyielding stone. Well Rumor knew
That waste that swept its arid breadth between
The living world and the mysterious wood
And kept them far asunder; 'twas the plain
Famed as the "Witches Doom." For there, of old,
Tradition said those beings, human shaped,

Yet leagued for evil with demoniac powers,
Holding, as of their wont, high carnival
On wild Walpurgis night, from a clear sky
Leaped instant judgment, and in monster forms,
Donned for the moment by their magic art,
Were they forever stricken motionless
And dumb.

Winding about among these vast
And granite forms, a pigmy among giants,
Won Thorold through the maze, and on its verge—
A sight that made his heart beat—was the wood.

How many years had flown since eye of man
Had looked upon that place, since foot of man
Had written on the soil its welcome script
That to the solitary stranger says
"A brother passed this way." A solid mass
Of close-set trunks, and feathered at the edge
With bowery growths of lesser trees and shrubs;
A stillness broken by no cry of beast
Or song of bird; only the breeze that moved
Those leagues of interlacing branches with
Its sighing, ceaseless murmur, rising now,
Then falling, on the listener wrought a spell
Of awe, a sense of solitude more deep
Than any silence. Day passed in the search
For any break in that green jungle. Day
Peering once more above the trees, surprised
A little fawn that with round, curious eyes

Surveyed the sleeping Prince, and as he stirred
Fled to the forest. Following the fawn,
Thorold found where it entered, at a point
Where rocks, outcropping from the verdure, hid
Within their mass a narrow, winding cave,
And penetrating this it led him forth
Upon a path that, with thick-lacing boughs
O'erarched, pierced the dark forest. Weird and dim
And passing strange that sylvan thoroughfare
Where, like a wall on either side, the trees
Rose crowding up; as though to nature's rush
Of swarming life some calm and sovereign voice,
Some august Traveler, to mortal eyes
Invisible, yet ever on the way,
Should interpose an absolute "thus far."

III.

Now as Prince Thorold kept the gloomy road
The prospect lightened at a point, and soon
He came to where the way was opened out
Into a broad expanse of treeless ground.
There at the left a tower rose, grim and gray,
Ancient and lichen-spotted, crumbling too
In places where dark vines had taken root,
That gave no touch of gracious ornament,
But hung in ragged loops that in the wind
Swung drearily. About the keep a moat
As ancient, green with slime and foul dank weeds
That rotted in the sun. Silent as death
It lay; and silently the Prince drew near,
And wandered round it, wondering to see
Such signs of man within that lonely wood.

And while he wondered, on the stillness rose
A voice that cried: "From this dark tower, ah who,
Who shall deliver me?"

And instantly
The Prince made answer: "That will I! Ho there!
Who keeps the tower?"

Then the great portal swung
Slowly agape, until against the black
Within stood forth a form gigantic, cased
In armor, seated on a monster horse.

And at the sight the wood turned dark, as though
Black clouds obscured the sun, and a deep voice
Was heard, that strangely in the hollow vault
Echoed: "Who asks, full soon shall know who keeps
The tower."

And issuing forth, the giant crossed
The bridge, that rang beneath the ponderous hoofs
Of the great horse as though a troop had passed,
And galloping across the open ground
Wheeled sharply round, and with his lance in rest
Faced toward the Prince in all the majesty
Of his great bulk and strength. Then threw he back
His visor and disclosed a countenance
Of nameless terror. No mere catalogue
Of features, lines, or hues can image forth
That dreadful visage; 'twas a book wherein
The startled gazer read a myriad
Of dark suggestions, supernatural
And strange, that at a single glance possessed
The mind with a vague horror, mixed of all
Those thoughts of fear that make the bravest blench;
That said, "What's here, there's no mere mortal can
Contend with." Shuddering, Thorold fell back;
And seeing it the monster laughed, a laugh
More dreadful far than any frown.

And then
The Prince bethought him: "Why, I never feared
Antagonist before. Must I be brave

Then only when there's naught to fear?" Thereat
The generous blood surged upward with a leap,
And crying out, "What better than to die
Fighting 'gainst evil?" with a joyful shout
He rushed upon the foe. Then as he braced
To meet a mighty shock, shock there was none.
His good steed galloping, fled far beyond
The goal, until, the force of his onrush
Quite spent, wheeling, the Prince looked back and saw
Where erstwhile stood the monster—vacancy!

Forth burst the sunshine dazzlingly, and woke
The birds, that darkness had held hushed in fear,
To loud, tumultuous carollings of joy;
And from the tower again was heard a voice
That cried: "Thanks to the knightly arm that hath
Delivered me. I will come down."

But while
He looked to see a prison-wasted form,
Gaunt-limbed and hollow-cheeked, the Prince beheld
Forth issuing from the door a lovely youth,
Fair-haired, fair-faced, and azure-eyed, the bright
Impersonation of fresh life and hope,
Who with a light step and a joyous glance,
That seemed, roving from point to point, to find
In every object food for happy thought,
Came out to meet him. He was garmented
Like to a wandering minstrel; in his hand
A staff, but at his back his viol, strapped,

Swung lightly. Coming therefore to the Prince
He took his hand, and gazing earnestly
Upon him said: "Sir Knight, since thou hast found
And freed me, from henceforth I am thy friend,
And I will be thy comrade," and thereat
Quite simply ranged him by the Prince's side,
Ready to journey with him.

Straightway then
The twain set forth. The Prince so marveling
At all these things he found no word to speak
Beyond a brief phrase of assent, and rode
In silence, thinking, "What was the giant?"
Then, turning on the minstrel his regard,
Forgot to wonder, so did he admire
Th' elastic step that, without hurry, kept
Somehow abreast of him beside the horse;
The joyous pose of the uplifted head,
Crowned with the small light hat, like Mercury's
Without the wings; and the bright, thoughtful gaze
That almost seemed, while noting everything,
To look beyond and through, and there descry
A something undiscerned by common eyes—
Until his thought found outlet, and he said:
"Sweet Sir, to see thee one could never deem
Mischance had touched thee."

"Nay," the Minstrel said,
It never has."

"But," cried the Prince, "the tower!"
"Nay," lightly said the youth, "what of the tower?
The tower is naught."

So fared the couple on,
Sometimes in silence, sometimes in discourse
Of trees and flowers, of birds, the art of minstrelsy,
Until the sun was high, and coming then
Upon a swift, cool stream that crossed the way,
The knight dismounted, turned the steed to graze,
And the two comrades sat them down to rest;
Ate from the Prince's scrip, drank from the stream,
And then, reclined at ease, the minstrel strung
His viol and right lovingly began
To draw the bow across it, and with ear
Inclined, to listen, musing and smiling
Softly as one that heard an angel sing.

Even so Prince Thorold listened, finding too
In what he heard angelic harmonies.
For on that music borne, what lovely thoughts,
What sweet imaginings possessed his mind!
All bitterness was gone, and only peace
And holy quiet seemed to breathe around
And reign within. And all the while the brook
Kept on its gentle babble, like a low
Intoning of assent, until at last
The Minstrel set the viol's softest tones
With the swift water's murmur all a-chime,
And, low and dreamlike, with it linked a voice
That matched the mellow music of its flow:

A stream runs rippling at my feet
  And sings an old, old song
That listening beeches on the bank
  Have heard for ages long;
For whether skies are blue or gray
It still goes singing on its way,
  And cannot choose but sing.

The mountains lifting high their heads
  Above the thirsty plain,
Ask of the clouds their gifts of snow
  And do not ask in vain;
Then send it down upon its way
A stream to cheer the summer day,
  To leap and laugh and sing.

From stones that seek to check its flow
  It gathers added might,
Makes of their tops a vantage ground,
  And leaps to catch the light,
And weaves it in a network gay
That brightens all its wandering way
  As on it flows and sings.

Sing, pilgrim! stream or mortal thou,
  Upon thy devious course,
Remembering in thy wanderings
  How lofty was thy source.
Though through the lowlands lie thy way,
Catch every errant sunbeam's ray
And, laughing with the laughing day,
  Forget thou not to sing.

Companioned thus, Prince Thorold journeyed on.
Little he recked of how or where he went,
But tramped the road because the road was there,
His mind all bent to lose no look or word
Of this his new, most strange, enchanting friend.
Bridle on arm he led the willing horse
And walked beside the Minstrel, listening
To casual talk that, to his quickened sense,
Suggested something more than met the ear,
And kept him wondering, questioning, alert.
"Is here," he thought, "a key. Here in this youth
My hoary doubt's solution?" Yet the talk
Was all of common themes, though each set forth
With a light touch that showed a master-hand;
The sun shone brighter, fresher bloomed the morn,
And each familiar object caught new grace
Because he noticed them. Then in the growths
That fringed the path he pointed out strange fruits
New to the Prince, good fare for man or beast,
From which henceforth they ate. When night drew on
He gathered fallen wood and built a fire,
Whereby, wrapped in their cloaks, they lay and slept.
Then up betimes, and through a valley's long
And sinuous course beside the glittering stream
That marked its center, slowly on they went,
Till at its farther limit, where the way
Ascended, growing difficult and steep,
They left the horse to graze within the vale
Upon its ample pasturage, and took
The hill-path sturdily.

IV.

Day after day,
Through scenes familiar fared the friends; the same
Old Mother Earth, yet to young Thorold's eyes
Without, within, a strange undreamed-of world
Was opening. Night by night they lay and saw
The giant Scorpion draw his sparkling length
Along the Southern sky, and, following close,
The bright, unresting Archer; while above,
The old, old wonder, ever new, the dome,
With all its twinkling jewels set, revolved.
Thus, as one starlit evening fell, they sat
Silent beside the camp-fire, looking out
From its warm circle into darkness soft
And still, and up to the warm glow of Heaven.
Prince Thorold's thoughts still dwelling on his griefs,
His strange world-weariness, his bitter doubts,
Despair of earth and heaven, up to his lips
They rose, and of his new-found friend once more
He asked, "What is it worth?" Saying, "Thus I think
Our Arlen's famous poet truly spake:

" 'Fast fall the petals from the flower,
But now, the pride of Beauty's bower,
Its little day is done.

" 'Drag out thy little ailing hour,
O Man! ere yet the long night lower,
Forever set thy sun.

" 'So runs the tale of life and power,
A weary way, a worthless dower,
And lost as soon as won.' "

"Ay," said the Minstrel, "so thy poet wrote;
His was a smoky light. Another script
I read, writ by another poet, large,
Upon the face of nature, with all hues
Richly illuminate. As my poor skill
May best translate, something like this it runs:

" 'The petals gone the flower that rayed,
Set free the seeds that, airblown, made
A hundred flowers bloom.

" 'And thou, O man, be not afraid,
But when at last thou hast obeyed
The universal doom,

" 'From less to more rise undismayed,
Planet and star-dust all arrayed
To give thee scope and room.'

"I think this poet speaks the truth. But ah!
You men! You make your own droll world and then
You take your work so seriously! I have seen

Both men and women weep because it frowned
Upon them, or because it gave them not
Consideration, money, place, and power
Among their little brethren. Oh! to see
Them running at the beck of purblind Time
That mowing sits and tosses painted balls
And laughs in vacant, senile joy to see
His children scramble for them, falling oft
And fighting for the baubles, each with each.
And when they fail to catch them, how they mourn
And cry to heaven for pity of their woes!
Yet all the while the sun is shining. Sky
And earth are gay with light and blithe with song;
All natural joys hold out their brimming cups;
And Love stands waiting near, the beautiful,
The holy, the sufficing!—as they pass,
The frantic crowd, laying upon each a touch
Of soft detaining, lifting upon each
Her mild celestial gaze, saying to each:
'Lo! I am here!' And all that see that face
Are glad. One moment soothed and sane, and then
The madness seizes them, and like a throng
Of raging, foaming flagellants, they rush
Once more upon the strife with emptiness.
But thou, friend, dost thou ask me what thy world
Is worth? Truly I know not; yet of this
Consider—if indeed it please thee not,
Then what forbids to build it up anew?"

While yet the Prince sat pondering on his words
The Minstrel took the viol and began
A dreamy preluding, that wandered on
From theme to theme, till on the calm night air,
In tones of rich appealing sweetness, rose
A song:

"Speak thou, my viol; let me hear
The voice that in the forest long ago
The singing Dryad uttered, sweetly clear,
Light in her leafy shelter swaying to and fro.

"Low to herself, and drowsily,
She hummed when winds were light and days were long;
With droning bees made lazy harmony,
To sound of lapsing waters crooned her sleepy song.

"But when, fierce-rushing from the sea,
The blast among the rocking tree tops roared
And woke the forest tribes to elfin glee,
High on the trembling air her rapture was outpoured.

"So, year by year, in sun and rain,
The nymph sang, housed in her beloved tree
That thrilled through every fibre to the strain,
Steeped to its inmost heart in melting melody.

"And thou, my viol, of that tree,
So stored, wert shaped; and still when I invoke
Thy tender voice, come sweetly back to me
The same vibrations that of old the wood-nymph
woke.

"As thrilling from thy strings they rise
I seem to see a light, elusive form,
A leaf-crowned head and timid, glancing eyes,
The haunting spirit that once wrought thine Or-
phic charm.

"Sing then, my viol; once more wake
The wild sweet forest-music that of yore
The singing Dryad taught thee; for her sake
Who still inspires thee, wake, oh! wake that
strain once more."

He ceased; and instant, from the neighboring heights,
An airy voice responded, "More, more, more!"
Light laughed the Minstrel, crying, "Art thou there?
And wilt have more? Then so thou shalt, sweet sprite!"
And launching a gay measure thus he sang:

"Where is Echo? Is she near?
Will she answer? Echo dear!
Echo! Echo! dost thou hear?
Hark to Echo, calling 'here!'

" 'Here!' she's calling from the wood;
'Here!' from where, across the flood,
Palisaded banks arise;
'Here!' from where the quarry lies.

"Calling 'here!' from everywhere;
Mocking spirit! Child of air!
Shall I never see thy face?
Never find thy dwelling place?

"Other nymphs will come and play;
From the river and the bay,
From the fountain and the tree
They will run to romp with me.

"Only Echo, sly or shy,
'Echo! Echo!' though we cry,
Fauns or satyrs, elves or gnomes,
Only Echo never comes."

The song fell silent, but the viol still
Went murmuring on, until its dying tones
Led the rapt listener to the gates of sleep;
Which yet he could not enter, for he thought:
"Why does the music, why do all things sweet
And beautiful remind me of Emilia?"

And lying there, his busy mind recalled
The fairy child, large-eyed, with glints of gold
Among her tawny tresses, as she came

Long since to Arlen, daughter and sole child
Of brave Count Emil of the Northern Mark;
For when her father sought the holy wars
He brought his heiress to the sheltering care
Of the old King. Then at the wars he died;
But still the girl remained ward of the King
Till she should marry with some strong-armed knight
Fit to maintain her rich inheritance.
A thoughtful child she was in those old days,
Yet merry on occasion. Tiring oft
Of her companions' play and bickerings,
She sought the older Thorold, found with him,
The student youth, congenial fellowship,
Became the comrade of his studies, read
With him the Latin Fathers; even found
With him her way—new, fascinating, strange—
Among philosophies, poetic tales,
Myths, legacies of the old pagan world,
The shyly hoarded treasures of the monk—
Young Thorold's tutor—half with sly delight
And half unwillingly brought forth, in fear
Lest in their charm might Satan lurk to warp
Souls so unseasoned.

So in play and work
The pair grew in close friendship till that day
When, walking in the fields one fragrant morn,
Before them rose, the bright embodiment
Of joy, of summer's triumph and young day,
A singing skylark. Toward the zenith straight

It soared; but as it rose some devil's hint
Bade Thorold strike the happy creature down;
And while Emilia watched it with delight
The crossbow twanged, and from its airy path
It fluttered mangled, dying, to her feet.

"Can I forget," thought Thorold, as he lay
Revolving all these things, "the girl's white face
Of pitying horror as she stooped to take
The bit of shattered music to her breast?
Or those red drops that stained her silken robe?
Or how she turned that stricken look on me,
Then bent her head and left me silently?
And never, from that moment, was my friend
The same. She made me no reproaches, gave
Me greeting as before, and yet a veil
Was fallen between us, slight, intangible,
But sure. Ah well! I think I hate, I too,
That boy that shot the skylark."

From that day
The time was brief before Prince Thorold left
The court to see the world in foreign lands.
Then to the wars to flesh his maiden sword
On Arlen's nearest foes, that, come of age,
It might carve infidels. So years passed by;
And coming home he found his playmate changed.
Tall, beautiful, composed, she moved among
The galaxy of damsels, courtiers gay,
As like them as a swan to a light flock

Of chattering parakeets. Suitors there were
In plenty for the heiress, yet she found
Ever some fair excuse to put them by,
And, to the King's despair, remained unwed.
With Thorold ever courteous, to his words
Attentive always with that earnest look,
The white brow slightly crisped with its fine line
Of thought, yet saying little in response.
Passive, resigned, she seemed to watch the world
As from the gallery on gala days
She watched the tournament. And Thorold so
Watched her, not understanding, wondering;
Yet vexed with other problems, falling back
With subtle irritation on the thought,
"However beautiful, the lady lacks—
Perhaps—the keen intelligence that seemed
To mark her childhood. 'Tis mere dullness." Yet
When, once or twice, his sudden glance surprised
Her own, it startled him to see the look
Intense, alert, profound, that, leaping forth
From 'neath those veiling eyelids seemed to search
His soul, then, on the instant, was withdrawn;
And gazing on that fair, impassive face
Amazed, he asked himself what cozening trick
Fancy had played him.

There were those who said
That underneath that calm exterior beat
A generous heart; that misery never asked
Her help in vain; that Arlen's length and breadth

Was debtor to her bounty—to the poor,
The sick, and to the sick of soul as well,
Angelic minister. Yet of these things
Her lips were silent and the courtier-crowd
Unheeding—where some called her cold, some vain;
Some said indifference was her crime, and some
That for the admiration of the world
Her every action posed. Among them all
Was none that understood.
Thus 'neath the stars
Prince Thorold held communion with the past
That somehow centered round one slender form;
And so communing slept, and, sleeping, dreamed
Still of Emilia.

V.

With varying hap
The twain kept on the road, a single path
That pierced the forest. And when Thorold asked
Whose hands were those that first had made the road,
The Minstrel answered with a keen, swift glance,
Saying: "Who knows? The only way lies here."

From thence he no more questioned, for he knew
This his appointed path. Sometimes it ran
Through level stretches where they gaily tramped
And filled the sunny day with jest and song;
Sometimes through sylvan dells where words were hushed
By sights of gentle beauty. But again
It wound through deep-cut gorges, where the rains
Had swelled the torrents and the floods were up;
Or climbed a rugged steep, thick-strewn with rocks,
Where every step was toil, where hands and feet
Were torn and bleeding from the stubborn fight
For every foot of progress, and the breath
Came thick and choked by the o'er-laboring heart.

Ah, then the marvel was to see the youth
Beside the toiling Prince go up and up,
Light as a springing goat, with face upturned

And roving eyes agleam, and not a glance
To make his footing sure; up where the winds
Were furious and their passing roused to wrath
The denizens of air-hung eyries; there
Undaunted, calling out and beckoning
Among the circling eagles.
Never toil
Fatigued nor danger hindered him; and oft
His light, swift footstep left the Prince behind,
Who, struggling onward, saw the daylight pass
Before a space was found for rest. As then
The darkness folded him, the forest seemed
To sink to breathless silence; not a sound
That broke the stillness, as though all were hushed
To listen for a coming prodigy.
Prince Thorold bore a valiant heart, and yet
When round him, like a thing of life and will,
The dark of that mysterious wilderness
Seemed pressing close and closer, and the air
To breathe self-moved, instinct with purpose, thick
With ills invisible, although his step
Rang stout and steady and his port was high,
His blood would play the traitor, leaving all
The outer posts ungarrisoned, to rush
In base retreat back to the citadel
And fill it with ignoble tumult.
Thus
One night, as fast he hastened on to seek
His bivouac and his friend, while all around
The whispering forest stirred as burdened with

The weight of some strange secret, suddenly
There came a change, and to his straining sense
The murmurs rose and multiplied—as when
The first faint mutterings of the coming storm
Become a sullen growl, a muffled roar,
Until in fierce, ungoverned fury, bursts
The tropic tempest.
Yet the aimless force
Of elemental nature cannot wake
A terror like to this. It was as if
The distance swarmed on every side with cries
Of ravening beasts; the sounds scarce heard at first,
Yet multitudinous, and drawing near
With every hurrying moment, closing round
One trembling, panting centre with its hoarse
Demoniac uproar.
Then as the Prince
Stood fast, while all his conscious being seemed
One rigid trance of listening, on his sight
The nodding shadows took new form, began
To coalesce, grew solid, and informed
With sinister and stealthy life, that filled
The air with threatening motion and the dusk
With fiery eyes, whose fierce unwinking glare
From every point were bent alone on him.

Bereft of power, almost of life, he stood
Waiting the end: "At last," he thought, "I die
As died so long ago that other one,
Prince of my line, whose vaulting folly dared

The haunted Wikkenwold! I fear not man,
But here are devils! Powers that ride the air,
Apollyon and his hosts! No mortal strength
Can cope with such."

Then from the frozen depths
Of his despair another voice arose:
"If these are spirits, yet I too am more
Than mortal. If this earthy house be doomed,
What then? What harm, what lightest breath of harm
Can touch its subtle denizen? It too
Shall ride the air, and rises now, transcends
The boundaries of its clay, and knows itself
The free and fearless master of its fate."

And so, as if the uttermost abyss
Of terror sounded, touched the farthest wall
Of man's capacity for dread, there came
A marvelous rebound. No question more
Of surging blood or stilling pulse; the flesh
Was as it were not, and the soul, released
From its long care for its poor comrade's weal,
That clogging care that makes its slavery,
Awoke, at last awoke, and all its deeps
Thrilled with the knowledge of self-conscious life.
All sense of earthly contact was dissolved;
The spiritual creature, from it husk
Defined and separate, and all at peace,
Lay on the bosom of Infinity
As on the mother's breast a careless child.

So lying, floating, was he gently rocked
By slow, soft undulations, as upon
The swell of some fair river, quietly,
The tired oarsman in his little boat
Lies lightly lulled.
Slow from the vexed air ebbed
The fiendish tumult, fled the phantom host;
Dissolved, like sable clouds that hid the moon
That, now unveiled, shone down, full orbed and still,
Upon the stillness of the shining wood.
And in its light, before him in the path,
The smiling Minstrel stood and swung his staff,
Crying: "What, brother! Dost thou wake? 'Tis time
For sleep and dreams."

VI.

How sweet the sunshine lies
On jocund summer mornings in the woods,
In patches ruddy-brown and golden-green
Among the cool dark shadows, lighting there
A fresh world new-created every day,
Yet every day a Sabbath.
Such a morn,
Whose dewy advent many fluttering birds
Were telling in gay rushes of bright song,
Had dawned upon young Thorold, and he spurned
The onward path in such an ecstacy
Of conscious strength and joy as showed him kin
To all the humble insect life that chirped
About his feet. Child of immortal hopes,
Yet, like them, caught and held within this web
Of matter; like them happy if the sun
Shone mildly; like them scorched by heat, withered
By cold, the toy of Nature's restless moods.

He laughed a little as he strode, and thought
What brew it was that made him feel
So like a god; then cast his eyes to where
His friend the Minstrel near him walked and mused.
The same bright front he saw; no more, no less,

Than when the rain fell, dripping hopelessly
For days and nights; or when the javelins
Of piercing sun-rays pitilessly beat
Down from a brazen heaven. Always in joy
He walked, that sometimes flowered into mirth
Or jesting sallies, whimsical and light,
The ripples and bright scintillating spray
That masked the deep sea of a soul unmoved
And calm; and wondering for the hundredth time
To see such youth with wisdom so at one,
Prince Thorold spoke his thought aloud—

"Ay friend?"
The Minstrel said, "Hast thou found wisdom here
With me? Who seeks shall find it where he seeks.
Yet marvel not; be sure he greatly errs
Who figures Wisdom hoary, bent with years,
The son of creeping Time. Time never touched
His garment's border. Never looks he back
For precedent, nor hoards the mouldy crumbs
Of ancient feasts, but finds for every day
New banquets; from perennial founts quaffs deep
The bright elixir of eternal youth,
And he is ever young. For he who knows
Weeps not nor mourns; dims not with tears his eyes,
Nor frets his brow with marks of futile care.
Fresh with the day, glad with the rosy throng
Of dancing hours, dear comrades of his joy,
He changes not. 'Tis Folly groweth old.
Therefore if thou from me, dear friend, indeed

Learn Wisdom's lore, thou shalt do well; and well
If in the lichen-broidered stones thou find,
There too, celestial witness.
"Knowest thou
The Oracle that hath a million tongues—
Nay, hath uncounted millions? Speaks by me
And thee, by human kind and by the tribes
Of earth and air, inferior to man;
By voices of the wind and of the sea
And with the language of the farthest stars?
The Oracle is one, its message one.
To every race and time it saith: 'Fear not;
Trust always; love unceasingly.' The root
Of all that Wisdom teaches lieth here."
So gravely, sweetly, with a quiet voice
And level, forward gaze, the Minstrel walked
Discoursing, till they paused upon the verge
Of a broad, lawn-like opening, green and still;
And in its midst, a strange sight in that wild,
A sanctuary set, whose stately spire
And gray stone piled on stone seemed to proclaim
The hand of man. Yet to the Prince's mood
The solemn fane, so like an outward sign
Of his mind's inward vision, brought no touch
Of wonder. With an even pace, as toward
The natural goal to which the morning's walk
Had tended, crossed the twain to where the door
Stood open, mutely calling them to prayer.

Within, no ponderous minster arches gloomed;
Instead, the glow of many jeweled panes revealed

A lovely Lady-chapel, filled with light
Subdued and soft, where slowly through the nave
The Minstrel led the way until they knelt
Bathed in its warmest glory. For above,
Where, toward the east, a vast stained window blazed,
Lit by the splendors of the early day,
Clothed with the sun and throned upon the clouds,
Colossal, beautiful, the Mother stood,
The Mother with the Child.

"Mother of God"—
Why not? Since surely through this door, the door
Of great maternity, came Love to heal
The discord of the world; since by this name
Of perfect Love at last we apprehend
The Lord of Life? Beyond this none can go,
Though this to realize, to understand,
Eternity itself be not too long.

You tell us, you that have grown hard and cramped
Of soul, self-disinherited, in search
Of reputation at a cruel cost;
You, blind with gazing at a single point;
You, in the name of science, ignorant,
How from the mother-dog you cut her breasts,
And how the patient creature still caressed
With tender tongue her babies while they starved.

Then tell us, you that with a kindly eye
Have traced the stream of human sympathy

To its far source, how on the soulless vague
Of ravening and devouring life
Dawned the first impulse of maternal care
And changed creation's face. From the first brute
(Unknown inventor of unselfishness!)
That toward her helpless younglings feebly yearned,
Springs the long, shining, widening track that lights
The sombre course of earthly history.

So where, on ancient monuments, rock-hewn,
In her protecting arms great Isis holds
The infant Horus; so where, pensively,
From glowing canvasses young Mary looks
With deep, prophetic eyes that inly brood
Upon her wondrous boy; so where, in homes
Of degradation, void of other grace,
In some poor woman's heart one spark survives
Of tenderness for helpless infancy—
So at the gate of life, witness and type
Of the One Ineffable, sole source of love
And life, forevermore the Mother stands,
The Mother with the child.

Ended the prayer,
Straight from the temple through the open glade
Went Thorold forth, nor cast one backward glance,
For where he trod there was the holy place.
Still through the wilderness wherever led
That clear-cut single path he followed on,
As, at command, the soldier on the march;

As toward his harbor-light the sailor speeds;
As on the homeward way, tho' late and lone,
The storm-tossed wanderer. For in his heart
Hope beaconed, there a voice he trusted spoke
High mandates; and before him, passion-worn,
Doubt-riven, Peace curved a smiling shore.

Even so,
Dreaming of peace, as slow he topped a hill,
Beneath him in the valley raged a flood,
A waste of boiling waters—as some lake,
Land-locked among the mountains, from its clouds,
O'er generous nurses, like a pampered child
In sudden fury should have burst away,
And leaping down the gorges, carried wreck
And riot through the underlying vales.
Baffled, while Thorold gazed athwart the gulf
Upon the farther side the footway wound
Like a bright ribbon up the green ascent;
And he stood wondering: "Is this, then, the end?"
Thinking, "it cannot be! A riddle set—
Deep, mystical, compelling—where is given
No answer? Cause and no consequence? Half,
Without a whole? Two joined with two and yet
No sum?" And far within him rose a tide
That matched the tide he saw—of negligent
High trust, of prescience and of swift resolve;
And crying, "I will keep the path!" he threw
His harness off, and running to the brink
Of that fierce torrent, cast him on the wave.

Then, like a being more than mortal, fought
The swimmer, dealing on the rushing floods
Buffet for buffet; sinking now, dragged down
Within those foaming jaws, then springing forth
As though from crest to spuming crest he leapt,
Borne on the potent current of a will
That rode the elements; till, past midstream,
One mighty courser of the deep, as though
In admiration of the puny arm
That still defied them all, lifted him up,
And racing shoreward flung him on the bank.
There swooning long he lay, till on his sense
Slowly the world returned, and looking forth,
Where late a rushing deluge stormed, he saw
A slender stream run singing through the mead.

VII.

"In what retreat, the lingering days beguiling,
Say, bright Ideal, can thy dwelling be,
While in my waking dreams thine image, smiling,
Bids me still seek for thee!

"When roses bloom, when roses bloom and wither
And fleck the gardens with their crimson rain,
When merry maids the fragrant harvest gather,
Then must I seek in vain?

"When through the wood the turtle-dove is calling
Her tender, plaintive notes upon the ear
In pleading tones of invocation falling,
Then wilt not thou draw near?

"When gentle autumn with her red and yellow,
In dreamy hazes veiled, tints all the hills,
And thousand perfumes, sweet and faint and mellow,
From fading bloom distills;

"When fallen leaves drift every vale and hollow
While sighing winds make sombre melody,
And when the failing years those dead leaves follow,
Still must I wait for thee?

"Winter will come, and when its frosts are over
I shall be gone to seek a land more fair;
In that fair land at last wilt greet thy lover?
Ah, shall I find thee there?"

High rose the song on wings of melody,
And with it, through the summer night, the thought
Of Thorold, as low-lying on the sward,
His eyes went wandering through that field of stars
Like golden dust thick-strewn upon a floor
Of lapis lazuli, a dust made all
Of suns.
And in his reverie he seemed
To move upon that pavement companied
By one whose face he saw not, yet divined
Most fair and dear, till thought was merged in dream.
A dream of deep-blue heavens where softly swam
Twin stars, that changed anon to starry eyes
Blue, luminous, that beamed upon the way
A guiding cynosure. The while a voice
Went breathing through his fantasy that said:
"It shall be well with thee. Who seeks among
The marshes shall be led of wandering fires;
From heaven alone shines clear the Pole-star."
So
Until the nearest sun put out the rest
And called the travelers up and on, and peered
Upon them through the unbrage of great oaks
That, sparsely set, spread knotted arms abroad
And meeting, shaded all the ground.

'Twas there
Amid the green and golden gloom, a stir
Of distant shadows caught their vagrant eyes,
That, nearer seen, became a merry rout
Of slender green-clad forms—men, or akin
To men—that ran and leapt and vaulted, now
In air and now skimming the ground, in change
Incessant, agile, writhing like the play
Of lambent flames.

Detached from these came one
Who, running forward, juggled with a ball
Of glittering crystal, eyes and hands and light
Swift, swaying figure following the toy
With graceful turns and sweeps, till suddenly
It slipped and, falling, rolled to Thorold's foot.
Who bent, as in a dream, and lifted it;
And on the instant all that flying troop,
As frozen in their places, ceased to move,
And stood at gaze with fixed unwinking eyes
Upon the Prince.

Then, looking on the ball,
He too stood spellbound, for within its depths
Another world was moving, scene on scene,
That chased each other swiftly from the field.
There lived again forgotten days of fair
Lost childhood; there upon his infant sport
His long-gone mother smiled; there, at his call,
The droll, fond jester ran, with all the dogs—
Not one forgotten—frisking at his heels.

There in first youth he and that other walked
And talked, nor asked the reason why the world
Seemed such a happy place. Therein the few
That from the first his heart elected friends
Appeared and passed. And finally a mist
Obscured the glass, that, parting showed one face—
Emilia!

It was she. The small, proud head
Poised light and flower-like, spite of all that weight
Of braided tresses; the white forehead, broad
And thoughtful, whence the waving locks swept back
In gleaming masses, and the glorious eyes'
Deep sapphire, darkly fringed. All these he knew—
But what was this? This something new and strange,
This, never seen in mortal lineaments?
The lovely mask, like a transparent vase
That glorifies, not hides, the light within,
Irradiate with soul, returned his gaze
With a long look that said, "Of all the world,
Here's one that understands."

A moment thus
The glowing vision lived, then from the glass
All slowly faded, till in Thorold's hand
It lay an empty, shining sphere. But still
He saw the face, still felt the spell, and stood
Absorbed in reverie till the bauble fell
And, rolling toward the juggler, was caught up,
And he, with all his green-robed comrades, sprang

Once more to vivid life, and with that play
Of leaping, writhing, flame-like motion, swept
Away, in lines that flickered and were gone.

VIII.

After long toil, long straining up the steep,
Shall not the faithful soul attain and stand
Upon the mount of vision?

So one day
Stood Thorold. Far behind him and beneath
The perils of the path, the rude ascent,
The rocks, the thorns, the phantoms, the despairs;
And as he lifted up his eyes, away
Before them fell the solid earth, melted,
And like that semblance of a city, brave
With castles, gardens and sun-gilded towers,
Morgana's fairy craft from nothingness
Upbuilds, was gone.

Then to the spirit's gaze
Distance was not, and looking down he saw
The arduous road by which himself had climbed,
And, following afar by strange detours,
The souls' innumerable multitude.
There dumbly strove the stolid peasant throng;
There fluttering courtiers wantoned; with their creed
Of self to hold them laboring back, there groped
World-moving politicians—carrying mud.
And there, wonder unspeakable, there too,

The stamp of ravin on each cruel face,
The horde of high-born robbers, murderers,
Exploiters of the poor, scourge of the weak,
The virtuous, were plodding with the rest.
Then, looking closelier on the toiling throng,
He saw that deep within each breast there burned
A still, white light, and deep within his own
The same still light—and knew his brethren so
In those belated wanderers. And those lights,
Those steady beacons—sign they were, and pledge
Of that sure Oracle that ever sits
Upon each bosom's throne and prophesies
Of Life, of Law, of Love, and lovely Death.

Then he remembered how, amid the noise,
The ceaseless clamor of the centuries,
The shuffling of the wrestlers, sounds of blows,
Shouts of defiance, drums' and cymbals' clash,
And bursts of crazy laughter, sometimes rose
A whisper that went wandering here and there
To mingle with those echoes, murmuring, "Yet
These that contend are of their nature high;
Nay, of the Highest drawing breath, are kin
To the Divine"—And most believed it not.
But Thorold saw it true, as clearly now
Upon his sense the inner meanings smote,
Until, with the Divine, he saw the end
From the beginning.

For those lights must rise;
However errant, still forever seek
That central sun whose substance they partake;
However lost, be found.

So with that light,
That thought, that vision, deep, interior, sure,
Drawn clear and limpid from the source profound
Of pure eternal verities, the seer
Stood rapt and silent. While the old world rolled
Its endless dogged round, like a blind horse
That tramps the treadmill, dumbly, day by day
Unknowing wherefore this must be; and while
Its human millions trod their circle out,
Knowing, as little why. But Thorold knew;
And as a watchman calls through night and storm
To those that sleep, from one small point in time
And space, rose an exultant cry: "All's well!"

IX.

Sleeping and waking, and a voice that said:
"Day calls, and Arlen, and thy Destiny!"
And lightly, swiftly—as a soldier-lad,
At eve of battle sleeping on his arms,
Leaps at the bugle's call—the Prince rose up,
To meet his comrade's quiet eyes, to ask
Mutely of them one question, "Ay, and thou?"
And meet the answer, "At thy need, be sure
I shall be with thee."

Forward, then, once more;
To feel no wonder as the path wound back
Among familiar scenes that led him forth
The way he came—for Thorold was become
Of those that understand.

Deeply at peace,—
The peace of life, not death,—so was he filled
With the world's beauty, felt within, without,
And mantling round him in those sights and sounds
That touched him now as symbols, faint, far off,
Of that celestial joy to which the soul
Is natural heir, toward which its course is shaped

From the beginning,—Nature leading up
With sweet maternal hints, suggestions meant
To pique us to discovery:

"See, my child,
How the swift waters sparkle; how the flocks
Frisk wanton in the fields; how on the air
Of early spring are borne a thousand balms;
How morning wakes with joy, and when the day
Retires, blushing and smiling, looking back
With bright, arch signals of farewell, about
Her splendid portal of the West how troop
The eager, sportive clouds, gay with all hues,
Crowding to make the goddess' exit blithe
And luminous with masquerading tricks
And Protean transformations!

"Have I not
Dimpled the cherub cheeks of unweaned babes
With laughter? And wilt thou, thou at full flood
Of reason, be a stranger to delight?
True, common joys are transient, for they shine
To teach thee of the ways of joy, vanish
To show the higher way, lest thou should'st miss
The perfect flower of beatitude.
They do but lead thee on that thou may'st know
These outward satisfactions all too small
To fill a soul too great for these, that longs,
Unwitting, for immensity; that seeks,
'Neath every veil, past all particulars,

The universal—will not be content
With less. Since to the glory that shines forth
Through all these fleeting outward shows of mine
The soul mysteriously feels itself
Akin."

Thus to Prince Thorald all he saw
Grew eloquent; while, strangely, this sweet sense
Of all things beautiful, of all things good,
Was doubled to his thought. For since that day
When from the glass his consciousness looked forth
With fair Emilia's eyes, was he aware
That consciousness was shared. No more alone
There where our comrades leave us at the door,
Within that citadel, so weak, so strong,
Fain to be won, slow to capitulate;
For there remained the subtle knowledge caught—
As swift from point to point a wind-borne flame—
In one brief instant, one revealing flash
From out a pictured face. Like perfume, faint,
Diffused, yet clear; like a pervading light,
Chaste, far-revealing; like a heavenly phrase
Of music, oft repeated, never old
Nor stale, the message lingered, murmuring o'er
And o'er, "in all the world is one—is one
That understands."

With blending harmonies
Of moving waters; leaves that, dancing, touch
And whisper; with the rhythm of waving boughs,
Of clouds majestically borne on high,

Aerial currents, ran that golden thought,
That inward sense of wonder and delight
Wherewith he felt, though not beside him, yet—
Yet somehow with him—moved a presence blest,
Adored, eternally familiar.

"When,
He thought, "was there a time in all the years,
In all the cycles, all the teeming worlds
I knew her not? Here at the center, close,
Of being, is the tryst; here at my heart!
Could there have been a moment when it beat
Without Emilia?"

Musing, exulting,
Following the Path.

To find, still gazing
In his quiet field, the abandoned horse,
Left masterless so long ago. How long?
Months past, or years, or aeons was it? Nay,
'Twas when the earth was ploughing drearily
Her dark and chartless course, but half-redeemed
From chaos; on her verge, like sable wool,
Hung black and noisome vapors; and her sides
Harbored a race of monsters, creatures spawned
To prey upon each other, destined all
To feed the stronger and devour the weak—
A world all slavering jaws and reeking fangs,
And greedy all-entombing maw.

But now!
Softly she swam on seas of golden mist,
Her genial flower-decked breast the training-school
For angels; and upon her course, ordained,
Securely guided, there was light!

So long
Between that time and this.

The horse, at sight
Of an intruder in his calm domain,
Threw up his head and sniffed the air as though
In every breath some dark suspicion lurked.
His eyes shot scornful lightnings and he stood
A statue of defiance cast in bronze.
Then, at the well-known whistle, lived again,
As with a bound the haughty crest was lowered,
And with a toss of flying pennons, mane,
And tail, forward he rushed straight toward the mark,
Pounding the sward with thundering hoof-beats, till,
His master near, he swerved, light as a thing
Of down and feathers skimming through the air,
And struck into a circle, round and round
The well-known figure; swiftly galloping,
Then slowing, growing gentler, stepping light
As if on egg-shells, till he stood at rest
Nosing the friendly shoulder.

Saddle then,
And up and on.

"Farewell to field and fen,
To shaded hill and hollow. Fare you well
Waters that, singing, taught; dumb things that spake;
Air that inspired strange virtues. Farewell thou
Mysterious wold. Forth! to the world of shows;
Forth! with a steadfast heart to what men name
'The Future,' and, what there befalls—befall!"

So came Prince Thorold once again to where
The road stretched out before him, white and straight,
To Arlen—just a purple blur, at verge
Of the far prospect, all that marked the spot
Where many thousand human creatures toiled,
And a great city roared. Nearer the blur—
Changed now to roofs and towers and pinnacles
That shimmered in the sunlight. Nearer still,
And from the gate swept, solemnly and slow,
A sombre cavalcade,—in sables all,—
Arlen's great banner, sable-draped, in front,
While on the air rose, sank, and swelled again
A mournful music. So until they came
Within an eyeshot of the traveler,
Whereat the stately movement broke. The van
Stirred with a sudden agitation, one
To another gesturing, exclaiming,
While the long-vanished Prince drew rein
In tranquil expectation. Wherefore they
Advancing to the presence, from his horse
A splendid herald sprang, that gloomed and gleamed
Sable and silver, from his towering crest

To mailéd heel, who, sinking to his knee
And bending low before the waiting Prince
Made proclamation: "Sir, the King is dead."
Then, swiftly rising, lifted high his hand
And shook the welkin with a mighty shout:
"Long life and honor to our lord, the KING!"

Epilogue

It ceased,—that all-pervading harmony,—
That flowing, floating on the tranquil air
Steeped it in music. 'Twas a goddess' voice
Reciting what I half interpret here,
And when it ended, silence with a shock
Smote on the sense.
So, looking up, I saw
The glorious muse still standing at the door,
And in her hand the iris-buds had bloomed,
Fair buds of hope, now richly opened out
Mature and perfect. So benign she was
That, spite of awe and wonder, I found voice:
"Lady," I said, "and is the story true?"
Again that music: "Ay, 'tis true. So true
Are all my stories. None may doubt of that."
"Ah then!" I cried, "these things are true, and told
By lips of an immortal. Yet to think—
If any read,—they'll say I made the tale!"

The Sirens

What ails the sailor that he looks and listens
  And shades his straining eyeballs with his hand,
And leans far out, wild winds his long locks flouting,
  To bend his dark gaze on the distant land?

What does he see?—the foam of boiling surges
  Thrown high as rush the breakers on the shore?
What does he hear?—the sea's mad incantation,
  The harmonies that underlie its roar?

The pearly gleam it is of white arms tossing,
  Of lily hands that beckon soft and slow;
And that melodious music is the chanting
  Of voices sweeter far than mortals know.

It is the strange, sweet singing of the sirens,
  The silver singing that no heart resists;
See! where they sit against the cliff, revealing
  Shapes of weird beauty veiled in tender mists.

Forward they bend, with arms outstretched and wooing,
  Then backward sink, the frowning rocks along;
So, rhythmic, swaying, with a woven motion,
  As weave the strains of their unearthly song.

The helm forgotten, slow the boat is drifting,
  Nor recks the spellbound watcher of its doom;
The world is past, no more its long illusion
  Can vex him with its shifting shine and gloom,

For as those sounds, above the sea's intoning,
  Distant, yet clear, mysteriously rise,
The veil of sense falls from his raptured spirit
  And all revealed the world ideal lies.

What means that song the eager listener knows not,
  What says its strain he cannot understand;
Yet, as they sing, his soul is filled with visions
  Of things that never were on sea or land.

Love without flaw, trust fearless and unfading,
  The burden of that wondrous singing seems;
It breathes of peace, and then, its cadence swelling,
  Chants high of ecstacies past mortal dreams.

What now to him the grind and crush of shipwreck,
  The angry clutch of the devouring sea?
What harm can reach the soul, at last awakened
  From earth's dull dream, from earthly dread set
    free?

Fixed all his gaze upon the inward vision,
  From its deep calm no thought of fear beguiles;
As strikes the barque his steadfast eyes are shining,
  And wreathed his peaceful lips with happy smiles.

The Painter

How tired I am with following all day
  Her that so long I have pursued,
So long pursued, and such a weary way,
  And with so slight reward—the glorious nymph,
Dear Beauty, Nature's sweetest child!
  Sweet, yet so shy and wild,
That, plead and coax her as I may,
  She will not cease to fly,
But turns and ever mocks me with her cry
  Of "follow, follow, follow me!"

Sometimes she stops, and poised just out of reach
  Will let me venture near, and so
Invites with airy gesture, glance and speech:
  "See! where I stand, here on this daisied bank;
No, by the maples will I wait;
  No, by the oak." Elate
I run, but swift she springs away
  And laughs, and putting by
Love-locks from roguish eyes, still doth she cry:
  "Come follow, follow me!"

Sometimes she beckons from a misty hill,
  Or where the pines loom dark against
A primrose sky; or looking down some still,

Fair golden vista of the woods, to where
The sinking sun half veils his rays
In rosy-purple haze,
I see—with silent rapture see—
A fair form flitting, tall,
And light and lithe, and hear a silver call:
"O follow! O come follow me!"

But sometimes, on some rarest day of days,
The demi-goddess, half of earth,
And heavenly half, relents at last and stays,
And bends on me the glory of her smile;
And even lets me take her hand
And try to understand
The strange, deep mystery of her eyes.
But long she will not bide,
And, gazing softly on me, slips aside,
Still murmuring gently, "follow me!"

So must I follow, so I cannot choose
But to pursue this haunting joy,
This glory, this despair! Nor would I lose
The quest, more dear than other fuller prize.
And even when, the daylight gone,
The vision is withdrawn,
And I muse, lonely, by the hearth,
Still in my breast I hear
The echo of that call, faint, far and clear:
"Come follow! O, come follow me!"

Do You Remember?

When dear friends, long by distance parted,
Meet once again to count the vanished years,
What joy is theirs, what eager, happy greeting,
What tender laughter, trembling close to tears!
How, stilled at last
The joyous tumult, fondly to the past
Their thoughts are turned, and deep in converse they
Sit quiet, while with beaming looks they say,
"Do you remember?"

I think t'will be so when the morning,
The new world's sunrise, melts the mists of this;
When loved, familiar faces throng about us,
While we stand rapt and lost in purest bliss.
"What! you are here?
And you, old friend! And you, long lost and dear!"
And turning, radiant as a child at play,
To one and to another we shall say,
"Do you remember?"

The Real Presence

And thou wilt say this bit of altar bread,
  This little cup of sacramental wine,
Are verily the Body of the Lord
  And hold incarnated the All-Divine?

Thou say'st truly. With the Spirit's flame
  The altar burns, and with this grace replete
Are hands of him that ministers—the walls,
  The temple's pavement, and the common street.

It treads with thee the wonted homeward path,
  Yet meets thee, face to face, upon the way,
And in the air doth press thine every side
  And greet thee in the light of every day.

The "Real Presence" said'st thou? Nay, put by
  Thy trifling measurements? Can thought of thine
Compress the Infinite? Can'st thou divide
  The Indivisible by rule and line?

But let thy vain thought mend its halting flight,
  Leap at the truth, and thrill thee to the soul,
With subtle knowledge of this Presence near—
  This Presence, of Earth's seething life the whole.

Then from the Earth look up to Heaven and see
Come trooping from the east the starry horde,
And in a boundless universe discern
Unbroken, vast, the Body of the Lord.

Asphodels

Bliss be thy portion, O my soul,
No less than this thy due;
No meager dole
Of interludes t'wixt pain and pain,
Of slender joys and few,
That quickly pass, and leave thee sad again.

No lingering in the shade
Among the growing rue;
Nor shalt thou be content
To bind thy brows each day anew
With wreathéd poppies, meant
To bring thee brief oblivion ere they fade.

Nor with frail heartsease shalt thou please
Thyself alone, plucking with careful hand
Th' ephemeral flowers,
With pallid blossoms such as these
Thinking to lull the madcap Hours.
Better than this do thou demand.

Thou must have asphodels! that grow
On heavenly slopes alone;
That mock the sun, and from the ground
Light all the air with their delicious glow;
And where they may be found
Long hast thou known.

Remember how upon a day
Thou, wandering through a dark and lonely wood
With thy dear gossip, Melancholy, stood
Astonished, where a piercing ray
Shot sharply down and lit the spot where grew
The asphodels! and there was Heaven too!

So at the heart of things, where still
Are winds of passion, though harsh strife and gloom
Be round about, there can'st thou never miss
Delight; there, there where joys immortal bloom,
Go crown thyself with asphodels and fill
Thy doubting heart with bliss!

Neighbors

What kind of man, I wonder, can my nearest neighbor be?
For he's so very far away I really cannot see.
I'd like to know what sort he is, I'd like to see his face;
I wonder what divides us, for it isn't time or space.

For my neighbor walks beside me in the crowded city street,
And talks with me, and nods with me to every one we meet,
And laughs with me and jokes with me, and chatters full and free—
And yet I cannot, in the least, tell what this man may be.

"What ho! my neighbor, hey! halloo! come parley now with me;
I'll speak you as the sailors speak the ships upon the sea;
Pray tell me where you hail from, tell me whereabouts you're due,
What advices do you carry and what freight, now tell me true?"

But my neighbor hardly sees me, he hardly hears me
speak,
And he no more knows my meaning than if I spoke in
Greek;
And yet I know how wistfully he tries to understand
By the pathetic signal of his distant waving hand.

The neighbors come and go; they strive and strive
again to meet,
But still the yawning distances their fond endeavors
cheat;
'Tis the lonely, homeless longing, the yearning of the
race
For nearness and for comfort—to find a meeting place.

A sure, unalterable doom th' eternal laws recite:
No vast and dim horizon's rim the spirits may unite;
At the Common Centre only, the Rendezvous of souls,
Can they find that longed-for meeting, from their
widely sundered poles.

They're inward bound! they're inward bound! the
circle of the sea,
The while it holds them on its verge, far each from
each must be;
But if Love sit at every helm, straight forward each
must sail
And at that central meeting point ring out their glad
"all hail!"

Poetry

I saw an altar, and thereon a flame;
No fierce consuming fire, but calm and still;
Fed by no fuel, fostered by no hand,
Self-luminous, self-warmed, and self-sustained.
Up and still up it mounted toward the sky,
A flaming pillar, whose reflected glow
Lay on the clouds and turned them rosy, blent
With blues and greens and yellow of the dawn.
It lit the sombre earth and ugliness
Was turned to beauty; roughness caught its ray,
And every angle shone a jeweled spark.
And in its light men sunned themselves, rejoiced,
And comforted their hearts, and saw their lives
Transfigured; saw the brute creation held
A mighty something that transcends the world,
And saw, and knew, that something was divine.

And then I saw that here and there was one
That held a torch that none but he might bear.
Small was their band, Companions of the Torch,
And when for each the time was fully ripe,
Each lit his flambeau at that central flame
And held it burning, white and pure and still,
Untroubled, like its source, forevermore.

For wind, nor rain, nor tumult of the world
Could dim or smother that undying fire.

They took it to the darkened homes of men
And Weariness was rested, Grief was soothed,
Endurance strengthened; Hope and Faith and Love,
After long languishing, looked up and struck,
In deep and full accord, their silver lyres,
And Discord fled, and Harmony was born.

They flashed it on unmeaning surfaces,
And lo! the foolish canvas spake and taught;
Gross wood and stone took form that lifted souls
To worship; and the quarried marbles, hard,
And white and cold as are the hoarded snows
That lock the polar seas, absorbed the light,
Glowed from within and seemed to move and breathe
And smile in palpitating loveliness.
Mere empty syllables were wrought upon
Till, on the printed page, they burned! they flamed!
Awoke high thoughts, inspired heroic deeds
And kindled reverie to ecstasy.
And when on other forms its radiance fell
Its swift vibrations trembled into sound;
Music caressed the ear and spoke again
The same mysterious language of the soul.

A language heard and vaguely understood—
As one, in early childhood stol'n away
From home and kindred, to be reared among
A race of sturdy beggars, grown to youth,

And trudging some chance morning down the road
Among his lusty comrades, suddenly
Lifts up his head as from a neighboring grove
Comes stealing to his sense an old refrain
That, in the splendid halls where he was born,
His stately mother sang. He only stands
And listens, with dilating eyes, and thinks
"What is it? What?" Again that dulcet fall!
So keenly sweet, so strangely dear! what chord
Of nature or of memory vibrates deep
In answer to that song? He shakes his head
And, baffled, takes again his plodding way.

So when the flame of poesy burns high,
When the great poets speak,—or silent these,
And all their torches pale before the Source
From Nature's living altar beaconing,—
When beauty smiles from hill and field and tree,
From rushing clouds and misty distances,
Then what responses stir within the soul?
What dear familiar knowledge wakes from sleep?

No words can tell it—'twill not be defined.
No words are made to reach that depth, that height;
But where their gamut ends, high poesy
Takes up the tale and, glowing through the seen,
Reveals the unseen—hints at ecstasies
That will not be expressed, and leaves us thrilled,
Alert, illuminate; creates us seers;
Though dumb, the happy confidantes of Heaven.

The Song of Pan

Harp! forests, while I sing my song,
The Song of Pan!
Harp! all ye wandering winds that blow,
And green boughs, tossing to and fro.
Sing! waters, lisping as ye flow,
Sing! birds, that flute and cheep and trill,
And grasshoppers that chirp and shrill,
And every tuneful wildwood thing
Come, let me teach you how to sing
The song of merry Pan!

When with the winds I run and play,
How they buffet me! How they flout!
How I scamper and how I shout!
I spread my arms, and away, away!
I fly with the flying winds.
And they sing, as they blow, "oh! oh! oh! oh!"
And I answer them with my gay "ho! ho!"
And we sing together, as we go,
The merry song of Pan!

The stallions, running wild and free
With tossing manes and flying heels,
When they see me, run more rapidly;

But Pan is quicker yet, and steals
On the galloping steed ere it knows or feels;
And high on the air his laughter peals
As he leaps to its back and is off and away
And mingles his song with its shrilling neigh,
The song, the song of Pan!

And the wood-nymphs, when they see me so,
Come running too, and beg to go
To ride with Pan;
They lift up their arms as I pass by,
And their blue eyes plead, and their red cheeks glow,
And their robes in the breezes puff and blow,
And "Pan! Pan! Pan!" they cry;
But I laugh and shake my locks about,
And go galloping past with a ringing shout,
And sing the song of Pan!

But I know that when Pan is tired out,
And wants to sleep at the end of the day
On his mossy bed, that he'll get his pay.
For the saucy things will come creeping about,
And laugh and whisper and tickle my ears
With bearded oats and long grass-spears;
And the nymphs and the fauns will dance in a ring
And circle about me and mock me and sing,
And sing the song of Pan!

Sir Philip Sidney

A noble hound and straining in the leash;
A falcon chained, his haughty head held high,
His throbbing heart hot with a wild desire
To cleave his native sky.

The while his mistress soothes him with her voice
And smiles to see him shake his eager wings,
And lets him fly, then gently draws him back,
Musing of other things.

So in a silken bondage Sidney pined
While swept the heroes forth by flood and field;
Or while th' Enchantress of the Magic West
Held up her glittering shield,

And in the hues of sunset mirrored there
The wooing wonders of her realm, unrolled
The vision of new worlds and, under, wrote
The legend "For the Bold."

While on the soil of Flanders Freedom bled,
Stood like a lioness at bay, and cried
On generous souls for help, and would not die
And would not be denied.

But when pale Destiny would rend his bonds
She rent them all; loosed was the silver cord,
And from the broken bowl the fountain's gift
Back to the fountain poured.

So briefly was a gracious presence lent,
So quickly rapt to leave so grievous dearth
Where, mid her tempests islanded away,
Revolves the needy Earth.

For while the people, for they knew not what,
With world-old clamor rent the wearied air,
Across the murk a shining vision moved,
One moment lingered there,

Then swiftly faded while the whole world mourned;
But still they tell each other of that sight.
"Only," they say, "upon our dark he smiled,
Then passed away in light."

When poets, statesmen, soldiers battle-seamed,
Who stood a hundred times at grips with death
In that great age, Fame marshals in review,
Hear what the goddess saith:

"These men were wise and great in earthly ways;
They followed Fortune, Fancy, followed me;
Were worthy children of the little Star
That nursed their destiny.

But one was there whose life was like a bird
That, far from home, alights a little while
Where savage rocks and cold mists girdle round
Some barren, lonely isle.

And while the few poor dwellers mark with joy
The bright-hued form, the haunting voice and eyes,
The alien rises and is flown to find
His wonted Paradise."

The Way

Because he walked the way,
The only way
That through the valley, dark with gathering night,
Can lead the seeking soul to life and light,
Truly the Master saith:
"Come, follow me, if thou would'st save thy soul from death."

But, seeing one upon that way,
I bade him stay,
And "Friend, thou followest Christ," I said;
He shook his head;
"I know him not. They tell me, on this pathway dim,
Walks, far in front, Lord Buddha, and I follow him."

Once more
Threading that way, but stumbling, wounded sore,
One passed me, and I cried:
"Whom followest thou?" Forlorn, he sighed:
"Alas! no leader have I, groping toward the day;
But is not this the way?"

The way! the way is one.
And he who walks thereon
The good must follow, and the wise and great
Of all the worlds; and his a happy fate
That, faring on, their guiding footprints sees;
Or, borne upon the breeze,

Their voices hears, far singing on the height
Where the vast prospect broadens, songs of pure delight.
And well if, on the rocks that loom
To bar the path, huge in the spectral gloom,
A hand has written, "Here I conquered, as who follows may—
Here lies the way."

Love and Grief

While Love abode with me
Dearer than all was he.
"Ah Love," I said, "I love thee only.
"Go not, dear Love, and leave me lonely."

But when Love fled
To walk with angels, in his stead
Came Grief and took his place,
But with so like a face,
In every accent such a tone,
It startled me, as of a voice that's gone;
And when I heard his step upon the floor
I looked to see Love enter at the door.

I said, "Since Love is gone, I love thee. Only
Go not, sweet Grief, and leave me lonely."

The Angel of the Threshold

Poor pilgrims, following that mysterious form
  And shuddering as they went;
Sunshine and peace upon the path, or storm,
Still were their fearful eyes forever bent
To where, mist-shrouded, silent, swift and gray,
  The shadow takes its way.

Shrouded in g[illegible], they saw it through their tears;
  The gray of loneliness,
Of melancholy, uncompanioned years,
Of doubt! So, chill with dread, all comfortless,
They watched it stealing, and with bated breath
  Whispered: "Its name is Death."

Beyond the form, where mists shut out the sky,
  The Veil! the awful Veil!
And those who came anear it, silently,
The spectre thrust behind its hopeless pale.
The best, the dearest, thither, one by one
  Passed swiftly and were gone.

Until one sore bereaved, with desperate strength,
Caught fast the floating fold
Of that gray figure's garment, so at length
It turned and looked upon him, and behold!
Instead of grisly horror, grim and cold,
As mortal fears have told,

A laughing-eyed Aurora! crowned with flowers,
Her finger on her lip!
More fair than she that leads the dancing hours
As round the Sun-god's blazing car they trip.
So fair! So arch! As one who holds the key
Of some sweet mystery.

For, as she turned, the sombre Veil was rent
And showed it lined with light,
And all alive with every loveliest tint
That Iris scatters in her airy flight;
And every tint a tone, that sweetly blent
In music's ravishment.

This side the Veil is dark, the side we see;
But toward the sunrise, where
The Angel hastens, all one harmony
Of sounds and sights, of tints and tones, and there
Forever rising to new heights of bliss,
The sacred forms we miss.

The Solution

Come, leave thy little cottage in the glen
To seek the upland, view the haunts of men
And wide horizons. What! thou art afraid?
So deep in love with littleness and shade?
Art strange and homeless in this broad survey
Of hill and vale and opulence of day?

Wouldst shudder back to milk thy cows and hoe
Thy cabbages, the little thou dost know?
Then, with thy neighbor, lean across the gate
And, while great destinies and large hopes wait,
Rehearse the nothings of thy daily round,
Thy thoughts beside thy feet upon the ground.

Ay truly, plough and sow the field thou must;
But hearken! Sow thou not thyself in dust
To come up vegetable, as they use,
Our men of every trade. Nor shalt thou lose,
Leaving old ways of cozy narrowness,
But in the larger gladly merge the less.

Heed thou the voice that inly whispers thee:
Thou hast no home but in immensity;
Thou art a stranger in this little world

So transitory; from its altar hurled
In turn, thine every idol; mocked by shows,
Thy vexed life falters to its dreaded close.

Wouldst thou find rescue? Wise the soul and great,
And in its inmost deep thee doth await
The final secret; all that mystery
Whereto our sages ever sought the key
In rubbish-heaps; yet, only that they sought,
Men called them sages—though they found it not.

Seek this enlargement; find the treasure-cave
That entered, doth expand, and to the brave
Advancing, shows a palace, and beyond
A world, a universe! All fancies fond
Of heavenly things pale here, so wonder-fair,
So clear with light this free celestial air.

So! thou art timorous, lingering on this shore;
Too weak, thou sayest, hast no power more
Than just to tread this islet, hindered here
By every pebble. "Lone it is and drear,
Sequestered, hopeless, and yet who am I
To sound the ocean of Infinity?"

Thou art the Infinite, thou art the soul;
Hast heritage and freedom of the whole.
Have done with hope—discard it with thy fears.
Have done with plans, with anxious thought, with years
And measurements, with every mean device
That stints thy life and bars thy paradise.

Then thou that knowest nothing shalt be wise;
Thou, glamour-vext, shalt open seeing eyes,
Know what thou art and evermore shalt be
In these bright reaches of eternity.
Rise up! be bold! unlock the prison gate
And brave the splendors of thy happy fate.

The Sun

High rides the Sun;
All day his couriers run
To pleasure me, to bring me forms and dyes,
To ope the pretty eyes
Of flowers I love, to warm
And charm.

So bright he is!
Those lovely tints are his
That paint the rainbow; roses only glow
Because he made them so,
And planets wait his sign
To shine.

For he is strong;
And when the black clouds throng
To shroud his face, still, still behind their veil
The great sun doth not fail,
Nor ever cease the while
To smile.

Thou art the sun;
Why shouldst thou be undone
Because of clouds? Thine own the generous flame
That lights thee; still the same
Though all the face of day
Be gray.

Thou art the sun;
Though clouds confront thee, none
Are thine. One task thou hast, to shine
On worlds that darkly pine
Till all their forests spring
And sing.

Night and Silence

Kindly the beautiful, the all-revealing night
  Shuts from our eyes the narrow earth away
And shows instead a Universe of light,
  Sun echoing sun, deep answering deep;
Reveals the specious limitations of the day
  And flashes, blazing, on our sight
    The splendors of the steep.

Now, soaring through unnumbered leagues of air
  And through etherial spaces vaster yet,
The eye may lead the longing soul to where
  In contemplation she may wander free,
The irking bondage of the flesh forget,
  And taste, in blissful moments there,
    Her immortality.

True is the traveler's tale the dream-sped poet tells;
  Here are indeed those purple fields Elysian
Thick-strewn with yellow, everblooming asphodels;
  But only poets-born, since time began,
Have roamed those fields, discerned their Heavenly vision,
  Felt their entrancing spells—
    None others have or can.

And wandering through that Paradise at will
  How its deep peace the spirit's vision clears;
Noise comes from littleness—how still
  This vastness! See! those terrors that appal,
Those griefs that haunt us, they are phantoms all.
  Soul! art thou not enfranchised of thy fears?
    Ashamed of tears?

So speaks the hushed and holy calm
  Of solemn midnights, counsel pure
Of striving souls, and healing balm:
  "Thy cares are vain, thy trust is sure;
      Those pass,
  Like dew! like breath upon the glass;
    This must eternally endure."

Nocturne

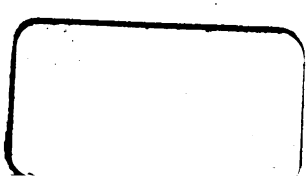
Written for music.

Night in her silver veil
  Dreaming doth go,
While, neath its luster pale,
  Murmurs she low.
  What saith she so,
  Lowly and clear?
  Listen and hear!

Secrets of peace she tells,
  Secrets of fate,
Moonlight and starlight spells
  Thou shalt translate.
  Hearken and wait!
  Night unto thee
  Prophet shall be.

Still lies the azure deep,
  Shining and still;
Edens of rest and sleep
  Wait on thy will.
  Fear flies, and ill;
  Angels are near,
  Listen and hear!

Shrines

What splendor on the mountain, where the clouds
  Lie white and floating on the airy blue?
That domed and pillared wonder, snow on snow,
  Or violet-touched, or when the day dawns new,
Or wanes, suffused with rose, with gold aglow;
And from within, what songs! as of the heavenly host—
  It is the Temple of the Holy Ghost.

But deep within the valley, where the clouds
  Hang black and ragged on the dark abyss,
Where mountains, ringed about it, from the day
  Hedge it with gloom—say, what abode is this?
This wretched cabin, dropping to decay,
Pestiferous, unclean, silent and lone and lost—
  It is the Temple of the Holy Ghost.